

Roll, John E.

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CONTINUOUS PAPER

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# Abraham Lincoln's Contemporaries

John E. Roll

Excerpts from newspapers and other  
sources

From the files of the  
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection



Roll, J. Linden

Springfield, Ill.  
Burial

Springfield, Ill.

Springfield Ill. Feb 12-1932

Mr Howard K. Terry  
Bustleton Phila. Pa.

My Dear Sir

Replying to yours of  
Nov. 7-31 will state that while I was only eleven  
years of age at the time President Lincoln's remains  
arrived in Springfield I have a very distinct re-  
ollection of viewing the remains as they were ex-  
posed to the view of his griefstricken neighbors and  
friends. How I was impressed with the elaborate cer-  
emonies, the profuse mourning decorations, the grand  
funeral parade and distinguished guests. My father  
was a member of the local committee to receive the  
~~the receive the~~ visiting party and my brother was  
marshall of one division of the grand parade.

My father, John Eddy Roll, came to Springfield in  
June 1838 and in the following Spring helped Lincoln  
build the flatboat in which Lincoln shipped a cargo  
of merchandise to New Orleans. I have a ledger show-  
ing that my father did some work in remodeling  
the Lincoln home in Apr. 1849 and took in part  
payment for his labor "six walnut doors", which  
my father had made into furniture which is now

in my possession. In a speech made in the Lee cap  
itol in which Lincoln said "the country could not live  
half slave and half free", he referred to my father who  
was in the audience when he added, "We were all slave  
at one time but white men could make themselves free  
but negros could not, there is my old friend John  
Roll he used to be a slave but he has made him-  
self free and I used to be a slave and now I am so  
free may let me practice law". When the Lincoln  
family went to Washington in 1860 they left their  
dog "Fido" with us and he made it his home until he  
died. My father tells how, one day, he and a Mr  
Lewis were talking on the street and Lewis said  
"John why don't you run for office? you have en-  
ough tenants to elect you", and my father replied,  
"When Lincoln is elected President I would ex-  
pect him to give me an office." Lincoln came  
along while they were talking about that time  
and Lewis told him what they were talking about  
and Lincoln laughed and said "When I am  
elected President I'll give John an office because  
he helped me build the flat boat." This was long  
before Lincoln was ever thought of <sup>for</sup> President.  
So my father claimed he was the first man offered  
an office by Lincoln. I mentioned these incidents to  
show how closely my father was associated with  
Lincoln. I could fill many pages of similar incident  
but this will suffice. Most Respectfully, J. Linden Roll  
825 Henrietta St.

## 2/3-1931 Making Conversation

Ill. State

BY J. EMIL SMITH.

Journal

Owners of dogs can find interest in the story of Abraham Lincoln's yellow dog, Fido.

"Like his master, Fido was assassinated," says John L. Roll, 825 Henrietta street.

When Lincoln was elected to the presidency and left for Washington to preside over the destinies of the nation, he placed the dog in the keeping of Mr. Roll's father, John E. Roll.

Fido was a mongrel or cur dog, but of a most friendly nature. His friendliness, manifested on one occasion by jumping and placing his paws on the breast of a half-intoxicated man caused his death. The man plunged a knife into the dog's body.



J. EMIL SMITH

Mr. Roll brought me a copy of an old magazine, published years ago, in which was detailed the story of Fido and his death. The author of the article wrote the story after an interview with Mr. Roll's father. The article says:

"Old Fido loved his master; loved him only as a poor dumb brute knows how to love. And perhaps Fido knew his master as few if any human friends knew him.

"Fido had not much to brag of in pedigree. He was not an aristocrat. I doubt if his master would have cared to have him about had he been a dog with a pedigree. To tell the truth he was only a typical 'yaller dog.'

"Affectionate of disposition, Old Fido would watch for his master and then follow him about with every manifestation of canine de-

light until he had succeeded in reaching his face with that dumb caress that only can be given by a dog as expression of his love.

"To a nature such as Lincoln's the companionship of a dumb brute is particularly acceptable. Fido had a ready response to his every mood and was happy when, without a word, the strong hand of his master stroked his head.

"After the first greeting of a dog's kiss on his face, Fido was content to lie quiet until another greeting was in order, when the dog would bark and jump until, with his muddy forepaws on his master's breast, he succeeded in reaching Lincoln's face.

"When the Lincoln family moved to Washington no little concern was felt in regard to Fido. It was at last decided to leave him with an old friend, Mr. John Roll of Springfield. The dog took the moving of the family with philosophical fortitude, and endeared himself to the family with which he spent his last days.

"Mr. Roll yet speaks tenderly of him and sorrowfully of his tragic fate, bemoaning the fact that, in his words, 'Fido, too, was assassinated.'

"The circumstances were as follows: Charlie Plank, a half-drunken man, was one day whittling a pine stick when Fido came bounding along and, as usual, sprang forward with his fore feet raised. In drunken rage, the man thrust his knife into the animal, and poor Fido ran away, not to be found for a month after, when his lifeless body was discovered under an old church.

"Poor old Fido was buried by loving hands in a spot that is kept sacred to this day. It is as Lincoln's dog that Fido will particularly interest with a verification of the old saying, 'Love me, love my dog.'

"Yet aside from this connection, his faithful life deserves a tribute."

## THE STORY OF THE ROLLS

In the spring of 1828, William Roll, his brother, Jacob and the latter's son, Pierson Roll, arrived in Sangamon Town from New Jersey. William Roll became a farmer, his brother, Jacob, was the owner of a store, a grist mill and the Sangamon Town Postmaster and Pierson Roll became an extensive land owner.

Two years later, John Roll, followed his father, William Roll to Sangamon Town with the balance of the Roll family. It was here that the younger Roll met Abraham Lincoln for the first time early in 1831 when he helped the latter build the flat boat that later became lodged on the Rutledge Dam at New Salem, Illinois. John made all the wooden pins for the boat, as in those days wooden pins were used in place of nails.

After Lincoln departed from Sangamon Town life once more became dull and John Roll, like his friend "Abe" left the village and made his home at Springfield, Illinois. It was at Springfield some years later that Mr. Lincoln made his first political promise, stating that when he became president he would give John Roll an office.

John Roll was one of the contractors on the Old State House in Springfield, while his brother-in-law, John F. Rague, was its architect. As a contractor Roll made repairs at the Lincoln home in 1849 and in settlement for the work received "six walnut doors and cash." The doors were made into furniture and souvenirs, which presently are in the author's possession.

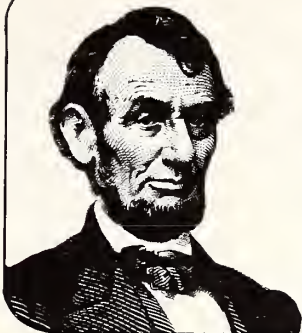
In 1854 John Roll's son, William VanDyke Roll, was a school mate of Robert Lincoln at the Illinois State University. His two smaller children, Frank P. and John Linden Roll were playmates of Tad and Willie Lincoln. When the Lincolns departed for Washington they presented their dog 'Fido' to the Roll boys.

When Mr. Lincoln made his House Divided Speech in the Old State House he said, "There is my friend, John Roll, etc. etc.....". This friendship persisted to Lincoln's untimely death, after which John Roll until his death in 1901 lived in reveries of his beloved hero of the 'Flat Boat' building days.

The Rolls, with one exception, your author, have followed their friends the Lincoln to the Great Beyond. John Linden Roll is the last of those Rolls that were so intimately associated with the Lincolns. His fondest possessions are the hundreds of souvenirs, pictures, clippings and tokens dealing with Lincoln.

I do hope this short biographical sketch gives you a small fraction of the pleasure that I derived in compiling it for you.

Sincerely,  
*John Linden Roll*  
JOHN LINDEN ROLL.



# Lincoln Lore

May, 1981

Bulletin of the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum. Mark E. Neely, Jr., Editor  
Mary Jane Hubler, Editorial Assistant. Published each month by the  
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Number 1719

## BEEN TO SPRINGFIELD LATELY?

The answer every Lincoln enthusiast would like to be able to give is, yes. Of all the Lincoln sites in the country, none is as important as Springfield. Lincoln's home, his tomb, his law office, the legislature in which he served, the state supreme court before which he argued, and the railroad station from which he departed for Washington are in Springfield. The Illinois State Historical Library contains the research materials that all Lincoln students want and need to read. The whole environment is invigorating and always serves to spur enthusiasm for research on the life of America's most important President.

Springfield's ambience has always been conducive to learning about and appreciating Abraham Lincoln's life. Those of you who have not been to Springfield lately are in for a pleasant surprise when you return to this Lincoln mecca. The

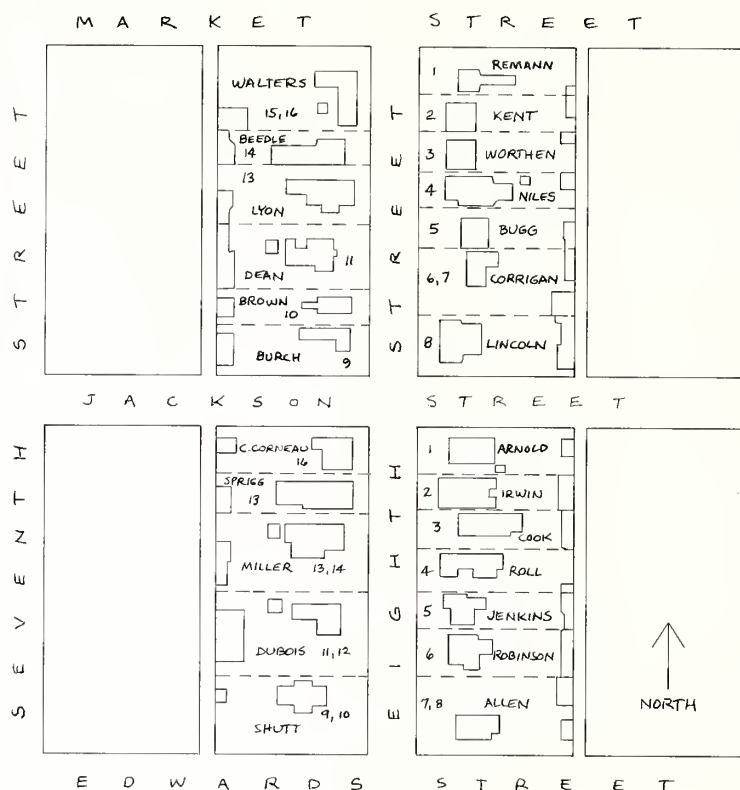
improvements in the Lincoln sites in recent years are far too numerous to catalogue here, but the most ambitious recent work deserves special notice.

The National Park Service, which administers the Lincoln Home National Historic Site, has embarked on a program to enhance the environment around the Lincoln home, pushing back the commercial blight which threatens so many of the nation's historic landmarks. The Lincoln home is not a brave little clapboard shrine bobbing on a sea of asphalt parking lots. It is not surrounded by tawdry curio-hawkers and phony museums which derive their only real element of authenticity from the genuine historic site they exploit and degrade. Visiting the Lincoln home consists of more than one briefly exhilarating encounter with an honest original preceded and followed by jarringly depressing confrontations with flim-



*Courtesy National Park Service*

FIGURE 1. William Beedle house.



From the Louis A. Warren  
Lincoln Library and Museum

**FIGURE 2. Map of Mr. Lincoln's neighborhood, adapted from the "Historical Base Map, 1860" drawn by the National Park Service.**

flams and neon. It is, instead, a soothing, moving encounter with the environment of Abraham Lincoln's America.

Picket fences line the board sidewalks which lead the visitor through a four-block area the National Park Service describes as "Mr. Lincoln's neighborhood." At the rate of one house a year, the National Park Service has been restoring the homes around Lincoln's home to look, as nearly as possible, as they did in 1860. As always, the Park Service is willing to compromise with the inexorable ravages of time. Some homes are gone and probably cannot be replaced. Others cannot be reasonably restored to an 1860 state. In general, they will be more demanding of the buildings closest to the Lincoln home and allow more license in those further away. Near the Lincoln home, they may reconstruct a missing structure or two. All of the buildings will have information signs in front.

To date, the houses of William Beedle and George Shutt have undergone renovation. The Henson Robinson house is currently undergoing restoration (built in 1863, it is another of the Park Service's compromises). Others will follow in future years. Already, one feels more at ease in the area of the Lincoln home, and, when the project is completed, visitors will be able to stroll the streets of Lincoln's neighborhood much as he might have done himself.

Who were Lincoln's neighbors? George W. Shutt, who rented his home in 1860, was a young Democratic lawyer who spoke at a rally for Stephen A. Douglas in 1860. Members of the Shutt clan had been in Sangamon County for decades. Like many of Springfield's citizens, they had come from Virginia to Illinois via Kentucky. George's relationship with the other Shutts is not clear, but he had married a Virginian, Mary Osburn, and shared Democratic political sympathies with the earlier Shutt pioneers in Sangamon County.

William H. Beedle was also a renter. He made his living as a fireman, but little else is known of this man who was not a long-time Springfield resident.

Henson Robinson, on the other hand, lived in Springfield for more than forty years. Born in Xenia, Ohio, in 1839, he came to

Springfield in 1858. A tinner by trade, Robinson entered a partnership with George Bauman in 1861 to sell stoves, furnaces, and tinware. Contracts for the manufacture of soldiers' mess plates and tin cups during the Civil War brought prosperity. A Methodist and a temperance man, Robinson was nevertheless a member of the Democratic party while Lincoln was still in Springfield. The Sixteenth President, of course, never saw Robinson's house, but its style is in keeping with the other restorations, and retaining the structure helps maintain the urban flavor of fairly dense settlement proper for the Lincoln neighborhood.

Sarah Cook, Robinson's neighbor on the present site, was a widow with six children. She rented her home from John A. Mason and took in roomers to help make ends meet. Mrs. Cook was born in 1809 in Warren, Ohio. She moved to Illinois with her husband Eli and settled in Springfield around 1840. He was a hatter. Her husband died in 1853, and for a brief time she operated a photographic studio in Springfield.

Charles Arnold's house is near Mrs. Cook's but located on the rear of the lot it occupied in 1860. Arnold lived in the house from 1850 to the 1870s. Born in Massachusetts in 1809, this transplanted Yankee, like most of his fellow New Englanders in Illinois, was a Whig. In 1840 he had been elected County Treasurer, and he was twice elected Sheriff of Sangamon County (1848 and 1852). Public office and Whig affiliation as well as physical proximity made Arnold an acquaintance of Lincoln's. He was married and (in 1850) had three children.

An even more prominent politician in Lincoln's neighborhood was Jesse Kilgore Dubois. He built the home across the street from the Henson Robinson house in 1858 and resided there for most of his neighbor's Presidency. Dubois was born in southeastern Illinois in 1811. He served with Lincoln in the state legislature, and their mutual devotion to the Whig party forged a fairly close friendship. He named his second child by his second

wife Lincoln. Dubois moved into the Republican party in 1856. Elected State Auditor that year, he moved to Springfield to assume his office. Reelected in 1860, Dubois had worked hard for Lincoln's election too, and he was to be sorely disappointed when he proved to have but little influence on the administration's appointments. Dubois was a loyal partisan but a man of narrow horizons who had hardly left his native state since birth. His request to have his son-in-law made Superintendent of Indian Affairs in Minnesota was opposed by the entire Minnesota congressional delegation, and Lincoln simply could not make the unprecedented move of appointing him in the face of such opposition. Bitterly disappointed, Dubois grumbled for years about Lincoln's treatment of him, but he did work for the President's reelection in 1864. He played a prominent role in Lincoln's funeral and was an active member of the National Lincoln Monument Association. Adelia Morris Dubois, Jesse's second wife, and Dubois himself remained friends of Mrs. Lincoln's throughout her unhappy widowhood.

Allen Miller, whose house is now next to Dubois's on the north, was a Sangamon County native (born in 1828). He and his wife Clarissa had seven children. He built his home around 1855. Miller dealt in leather goods, stoves, and tinware.

Julia Sprigg occupied the next house to the north. She was a widow, and her husband, Maryland native John C. Sprigg, had been a bank clerk. They had six children. Mrs. Sprigg herself had been born in Germany in 1815. Mr. Sprigg died in 1852, and Mrs. Sprigg moved to the house near the Lincolns in 1853. She became a friend of Mrs. Lincoln's, and her daughter often acted as babysitter for Tad and Willie Lincoln.

Charles Corneau's house, moved to prevent demolition in 1962, now sits next to the Lincoln home. He lived in the house from 1855 until his death in June, 1860. Corneau was Lincoln's druggist. He had also been a Whig in politics. Charles Corneau was born in Pennsylvania in 1826.

Almost nothing is known about Frederick Dean, but we do

know something about Lincoln's other neighbor across the street, Henson Lyon, who rented his home from Lemuel Ide. Lyon was a farmer who had resided two and one-half miles from Springfield after leaving Kentucky for Sangamon County in 1834. The home is famous for a post-Civil War resident, Samuel Rosenwald, the father of philanthropist Julius Rosenwald.

Many of the houses that stood near the Lincoln home in 1860 are gone now. The National Park Service may reconstruct a few of these, but most will have to be known from plat maps and census data, not from pleasant strolls through a tree-shaded historic site. In hopes of making this article a useful tool for the researcher, these now-phantom residents will be described in the following paragraphs. Those readers interested in this article primarily as a guide to the reconstructed Lincoln Home National Historic Site might want to turn to the last page for the concluding paragraphs on the site.

Moving northward from the Lincoln home, one finds the home sites of Henry Corrigan, Edward Bugg, Lotus Niles, Amos Worthen, Jesse Kent, and Mary Remann. Corrigan, born in Ireland in 1810, was retired by 1860. He was a good deal better off than his neighbor to the south, Abraham Lincoln. Corrigan valued his real estate at \$30,000. Bugg was a teamster. Born in England in 1812, he married a Virginian and had one son. He valued his real estate at \$4,000 in 1860, up from \$410 a decade before. By 1870 Bugg was a clerk. He seems to have been an ambitious and modestly successful man.

Lotus Niles, born in 1820, listed his occupation as "secretary" in the 1860 census. Whatever his precise duties,

they seem to have been remunerative, for he valued his real estate at \$7,000 and his personal property at \$2,500. Moreover, two female servants occupied his home along with his wife and three children. Amos Worthen was the State Geologist (he valued his real estate at \$5,000 in 1860). Jesse H. Kent was born in Ohio in 1812. A carriage-maker by trade, Kent valued his real estate at \$3,000 in 1860, up from \$350 in 1850, when he had listed his trade as "plough stocker." Kent had been a steady Whig in politics. The last house on Lincoln's block was Mary Remann's boarding house. A widow, Mrs. Remann had three children and rented rooms to John and Alexander Black.

Across Jackson Street to the south were the homes of Jared P. Irwin, John E. Roll, Jameson Jenkins, and Solomon Allen. Irwin had lived in Springfield briefly after 1837, when he laid bricks for the foundation of what is now the Old State Capitol. He returned to Pennsylvania, married, and moved back to Springfield in 1857. Irwin was an active Republican, an officer in Springfield's Lincoln Club in 1860. The Lincolns gave him as souvenirs some of their letters they were about to burn in preparation for their departure to Washington in 1861.

John E. Roll, born in New Jersey in 1814, had known Lincoln from the period of his earliest entry in Illinois. In 1831 Roll had helped Lincoln construct the flatboat he was to take to New Orleans for Denton Offutt. Roll moved to Springfield in 1831 and became a plasterer. He did well, valuing his real estate at \$4,750 in 1850, a figure well above that claimed by many of Lincoln's neighbors at that date. Eventually he became a contractor, building more than one hundred houses in Springfield. He was a steady Whig voter in the 1840s. The



*Courtesy National Park Service*

**FIGURE 3.** Julia Sprigg house.



*Courtesy National Park Service*

**FIGURE 4. Allen Miller house.**

Lincolns left their dog Fido with Roll when they departed for Washington in 1861.

Jameson Jenkins was born in North Carolina in 1810. He was married and had one daughter. Census takers noted the race of black and mulatto citizens, and the Jenkins family were listed as mulattoes. Mr. Jenkins was a drayman and drove Lincoln to the depot for his departure to Washington. His daughter married the son of Lincoln's barber William Florville. Solomon Allen, born in 1788, was a veteran of the War of 1812. He was a gunsmith. His barn still survives, but his house was demolished in the 1890s.

Across the street from the Lincolns lived William S. Burch, Ira Brown, and Ann J. Walters. Burch, born in 1814, was a clerk in a retail store (he valued his real estate at \$2,000 in 1860). Little is known about Ira Brown, Jr., or the widow Ann J. Walters, who had four children and valued her real estate at \$6,000 in 1860.

One of Abraham Lincoln's most notable qualities was his ability to transcend his environment. He was a common man, yet uncommon. His immediate environment is, nevertheless, always worthy of scrutiny. No one is completely exempt from the impress of his environment. Lincoln's neighborhood, it seems, contained both the expected and the unexpected. Many of its residents were substantial middling citizens who had steadily improved their economic lot. Men who had supported the Whig party predominated in the immediate neighborhood, just as they did in Springfield and Sangamon County as a whole. One might have expected the neighborhood to be more homogeneous in ethnic makeup, however. Persons born in Germany, England, and Ireland

were Lincoln's neighbors. So were mulattoes. Springfield may well have exposed Lincoln to a more complex variety of experiences than has been previously thought.

One suspects that more Americans learn history from historic sites than from books and lectures—especially after their years of formal schooling are over. Developing historic sites as the National Park Service now does is more than a matter of insulating the surviving reminders of this country's hallowed past from visual blight and from commercial exploitation heedless of authenticity. By enriching the memorials and monuments with the insights of the new social history, the National Park Service communicates an understanding of history that truly updates what the casual visitor may have learned in high school or college. All Lincoln students should acknowledge the distinguished role the National Park Service plays in keeping Americans abreast of the developments in the historical field which might otherwise remain the exclusive property of a handful of professional historians and devoted buffs.

It would be a mistake to end here and to underestimate the sheer pleasure involved in all this. No one who would take the trouble to visit the Lincoln sites in Springfield could fail to be impressed with the experience. If you have a chance, go there and see for yourself. If the timing is right, walk over to the Lincoln home around sundown. Tread the board sidewalks in relative solitude after the roar of the traffic on the busy street behind the home has subsided. Look at Lincoln's neighborhood in the twilight. You will likely remember the walk for the rest of your life.



